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AVELINO LEMOS

**THE NATURE AND ROLE OF LAY PEOPLE IN THE
CHURCH AND IN THE WORLD ACCORDING TO
THE DECREE *APOSTOLICAM ACTUOSITATEM***

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soborientação de: Prof. Dr. Pe. Franz Gassner

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Apostolicam Actuositatem	Lk	Luke
Acts	Acts of Apostles	Mt	Matthew
AG	Ad Gentes	Mk	Mark
Cf.	Compare	NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
Col	Colossians	NT	New Testament
DV	Dei Verbum	OT	Old Testament
Esp.	Especially	PO	Presbyterorum Ordinis
EV	Evangelii Nuntiandi	Rev	Revelation
GS	Gaudium et Spes	Rom	Romans
Jn	John	SC	Sacrosanctum Concilium
LG	Lumen Gentium	UR	Unitatis Redintegratio

INTRODUCTION

In the history of the church there were several councils dealing with different issues regarding the church and her mission according to the respective and specific historical situations at the time of each council. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was the last Ecumenical Council in the history of the church and is considered to be the greatest Ecumenical Council in the history of the Catholic church in the modern world. It dealt with issues related to the understanding of the church and her mission in the modern world. One of the crucial principles of the council was *aggiornamento*, “bringing up to date”, a renewal and refreshing of the church in her own understanding and her mission in the world. Thus, the Second Vatican Council has brought fresh air into the church. The church has opened its windows to the world. It began to read prudently the signs of the times and to get into a constructive dialogue with the modern world.

One of the 16 documents of Vatican II is the Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, promulgated on 18 November 1965. This document deals specifically with the theme of the Apostolate of Lay People. It builds on the insights of *Lumen Gentium* of Vatican II which envisions the church to be first and foremost the community of people of God on a common journey. The Decree describes the special status of lay people regarding their nature and their mission in the church, with the main purpose to articulate it theologically sound and to propagate the active involvement and participation of the Lay People in the overall mission of the church. The lay faithful and their participation in the mission of the church and

in the world is an important issue because they are a significant force within the overall mission of the church today, since the lay people constitute the majority of 97 % of church membership. Therefore, the role of the Lay People within the overall mission of the church cannot be ignored and should be reflected and promoted continuously on all levels of her life and mission. The mission of the church is a communal mission, meaning all members of the church have a duty to carry on with the mission of Christ in the world. The contribution of each member of the Church towards her mission is indispensable and cannot be substituted by others. In this research I try to discuss the nature, role, and participation of lay people in the mission of the Church as envisioned by the Second Vatican Council, primarily based on the Decree of the Lay Apostolate, which is the main topic of this research and which will be described in three chapters. Chapter One deals with two subtopics: the historical background both Second Vatican Council and the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. Chapter Two deals with the concept of laity and mission and their theological foundations envisioned by the Decree on *Apostolate of Lay People*. The Last Chapter deals with the specific role and mission of the Lay People in the world and here two important subtopics are discussed: the laity and their specific role in Church towards the world and its challenges.

CHAPTER ONE: THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DECREE *APOSTOLICAM ACTUOSITATEM*

This chapter presents two important subtopics which are looked at closely in their interconnectedness and relevance for this study. Firstly, a brief presentation of historical circumstances which influenced the realization of the Second Vatican Council and the second theme is the specific historical setting of the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*.

A. The Paths Leading towards Vatican II

Before discussing the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* let us first take a brief look at the historical circumstances surrounding the Second Vatican Council as a whole. The realization of the Second Vatican Council was enabled by various historical circumstances which can be classified into two kinds: The general socio-politic situation of the world and the renewal movements within the Church. John W. O'Malley states in his recent book *What happened at Vatican Council* regarding the general situations covering the time period from Pope Pius IX to Pope Pius XII: The Holy See faced the crisis following World War I and II, the Cold War, the French Revolution and Industrial Revolution promoting Democracy and Liberty, Equality and Fraternity of citizens, the crisis of modernism and liberalism, the emergence of Communism in Russia, China, and racism in Italy and Germany which climaxed in the horrific Holocaust¹.

¹ John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Second Vatican Council* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2008), p. 64, 80.

Regarding the renewal in the Church two important facts have to be mentioned: Firstly, already beginning in the nineteenth century and continuing in the twentieth century various renewal movements in the church emerged: a patristic revival and *ressourcement*, liturgical movement, Biblical movements, ecumenical movements and the promotion of the *Catholic Action*². The second important factor are Papal Encyclicals issued by Pope Leo XIII until the eve of the Second Vatican II at the time of the Pontificate of Pope Pius XII: His Holiness Leo XIII issued *Providentissimus Deus* (1893) which dealt with the authority of the biblical interpretation and warned against the dangers of misinterpretations of the Bible. Pope Leo XIII also issued the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) which at the first time deals explicitly with the Social Teaching of the Church. In accord with this Encyclical Pope Leo XXIII emphasized the importance of lay associations. Naming explicitly the *Catholic Action* he considered this lay organization as a form of participation of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy³.

O'Malley affirmed that there were two Encyclicals of Pope Pius XI which laid another ground for the later elaboration of documents of the Second Vatican Council. These are *Mortalium Animos* condemning any kind of ecumenical engagement which was seemingly dismissed at Vatican II in the Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* (1964), and the Encyclical *Casti Connubii* (1930) containing a condemnation of using contraception. This issue was not taken up directly by Vatican II and its teaching on Christian marriage but after the council by Paul VI in his Encyclical *Humane Vitae* (1968).

² Massimo Faggioli, "Between Documents and Spirit: The Case of the New Catholic Movements", *After Vatican II 'Trajectories and Hermeneutics'*, James L. Heft and John W. O'Malley (eds.) (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 1-22, p. 2-3.

³ O'Malley, *What Happened at Second Vatican Council*, 81.

Pope Pius XII was the last Pontiff on the eve of the Second Vatican Council. His Pontificate issued some Encyclicals which obviously made a great impression on his successor John XXIII who convened Vatican II. Firstly, he issued the Encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943) regarding the biblical interpretation in which he dealt comprehensively with exegetical methods of biblical texts. This papal document was very helpful in view of the later elaboration of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* of Vatican II (1965). Another important Encyclical was *Mystici Corporis* (1943) on the Church as the Body of Christ which gave a framework for the later elaboration on the church in *Lumen Gentium* of Vatican II (1964). Later His Holiness Pope Pius XII also devoted his Encyclical *Mediator Dei* (1947) to the liturgy where he takes up issues of the liturgical movement within the church. This renewal movement culminated in the approval of the first document of Second Vatican Council in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1964). In his last Encyclical *Generis Humanis* (1950) the Pontiff manifested hostility against modernism: Many theologians and philosophers of the church were condemned. Later the church changed her attitude regarding that issue in the Second Vatican Council⁴.

We see here that the Second Vatican Council as whole, including the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* was strongly influenced by previous developments in and outside the church. But regarding the role of lay people it should be above all acknowledged that “Lay collaboration in the service of the Church can lay claim to a tradition which is as old as Christianity itself”⁵.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

⁵ Daughters of St. Paul, *The Lay Apostolate: Papal Teaching*, Selected and Arranged by The Benedictine Monks of Solesmes (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1961), p. 9.

B. The Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*

The Second Vatican Council dedicates one entire Decree, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* to the Lay People and their Apostolate. This subchapter deals with three important themes of this document, namely the historical background of the Decree, its structure and an analysis of the respective document.

1. The Historical Background of the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*

The Second Vatican Council lasted from 1962-1965 and during this time sixteen documents were approved. One of these sixteen (16) documents is the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*⁶. It was prepared by one proper commission led by Cardinal Cento and by secretary general Msgr. Glorieux. The commission was instituted by His Holiness Pope John XXIII on basis of the first collection of material by the ante-preparatory commission: There were many suggestions from many bishops regarding how to define the status and the role of the laity in the church. Later the Bishops of Germany proposed to the assembly in the presence of Pope John XXIII to consider that the laity are an important issue for the council because various new movements of laity emerged in form of catholic action in the society⁷. The establishing of this commission was special because it did not correspond to any Roman Dicastery constituting the different Congregations of the Roman Curia. Hence, this commission and its task can be considered an innovative contribution of Pope John XXII to the Council. John W.

⁶ Bellitto, *The General Councils*, p. 135.

⁷ Hanjo Sauer, "The Council Discovers the Laity", *History of Vatican II: Church as Communion 'Third Period and Intercession September 1964-September 1965'*, Vol. IV, ed. Eng. Version by Joseph A. Komonchack, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo (Maryknoll et al: Orbis Book/Peeters, 2003), 233-267, p. 233; O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, p. 229.

O'Malley affirmed that the issue of the apostolate of lay people was taken up by the Council with the consideration to promote *Catholic Action* by Pope Pius XI⁸.

The established commission for the laity started to work hard by collecting various opinions regarding to lay people from all groups: Lay People, Fathers of the Council, Bishops and theologians etc. The members of the commission studied and elaborated those ideas into a scheme as first draft of the topic of the *Apostolate of Lay People* in five chapters. There were two occasions for a presentation of the scheme of the laity for discussion: on December 2, 1963, Franz Hengsbach, Bishop of Essen as the speaker of the commission, presented it briefly to the whole assembly and the second time the same one presented the content of the scheme to the assembly on April 1964. At this later occasion also some lay people were present⁹. The first draft was smaller compared to the structure of the scheme that we have now, because the first one contained five chapters and the actual has six chapters.

The first discussion on the scheme induced various suggestions for improvement and many appreciations: Cardinal Ritter praised the scheme but he said that “it was so clerical and juridical presented in the scheme”; Cardinal Browne agreed with that scheme but he asked to include that the lay people should be asked to obey their parish priests; Cardinal Laure Rugambwa (Bukoba) affirmed strongly that “The call to the apostolate always comes from the Lord himself, therefore the text should speak about the freedom, spontaneity, and initiatives of laity; the extreme of authoritarianism and anarchy must be

⁸ O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, p. 230.

⁹ Sauer, “The Council Discovers the Laity”, p. 236.

avoided”¹⁰; others Fathers of the council suggested to emphasize the Biblical and Patristic views¹¹.

Hanjo Sauer categorized the different emerging and discussed ideas into two groups: some emphasized more the theological and spiritual basis of the Lay People and others highlighted more the rights and duties of the laity in the Church¹². These different ideas required the commission to make revisions the structure of the scheme and to integrate the submitted suggestions. Finally, the scheme grew to six chapters and it was presented again for discussing and voting on it¹³. There is interesting to note that in the last discussion on that scheme, because also few new suggestions emerged, a layman was allowed to speak at the first time: Patrick Keegan, an Englishman, and the President of the World Federation of Christian Workers. He gave his opinion regarding to the scheme and remarked positively, that it is an advance regarding the relationship of the laity with their pastors and in making lay people to acknowledge their tasks for witnessing the Gospel in their life¹⁴. The final voting on it of all, the Fathers of the Council showed their overall excitement about the Decree: It was thereupon approved by two thousand and three hundreds-forty Fathers on December 7, 1965¹⁵.

¹⁰ O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, p. 230; Cf. Sauer, “The Council Discovers the Laity”, p. 251.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Sauer, “The Council Discovers the Laity”, p. 264.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, p. 230.

¹⁵ Cf. Secretariado Nacional do Apostolado da Oração, *Concílio Ecuménico Vaticano II: Constituições Decretos-Declarações e Documentos Pontifícios*, 11ªedc. (Braga, Portugal: A-Ω, 1992), p. 9.

2. The Structure of the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*

The Actual Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* consists of six chapters. Chapter I deals with *The Vocation of the Lay Apostolate* consisting in three numbers: The Participation of the laity in the Mission of the Church, The Foundation of the Lay Apostolate and The Spirituality of Lay People¹⁶. The text expresses the call to carry on the mission of the Church and is addressed to the entire People of God, all members of the church. This calling is founded in the sacramental life through which the laity are incorporated into Christ who instituted the sacraments. Their spirituality can therefore be called Christocentric, based on their union with Christ and lived according to their personal vocation and status of life.

Chapter II deals with *The Objectives of the Lay Apostolate* consisting in three numbers: The Apostolate of Evangelization and Sanctification, The Renewal of the Temporal Order, and Charitable Work and Social Aid¹⁷; the text presents the main goals of the lay apostolate in the world as offering an integral salvific mission founded in love.

Chapter III discusses *The Various Fields of the Apostolate* consisting in five numbers: Church Community, Family, Young People, Apostolate of Like towards Like and Apostolate on National and International Levels¹⁸; this text indicates the *locus* of the apostolate of lay people which has to be destined and therefore two fields are mentioned:

¹⁶ AA 1-4; Sauer, “The Council discovers the Laity”, p. 238.

¹⁷ AA 5-8.

¹⁸ AA 9-14.

The community of believers refers to the parish, the diocese, and the universal Church and the social environment as family and society.

Chapter IV deals with *The Different Forms of the Apostolate of Laity* consisting in six numbers: The Individual Apostolate, The Individual Apostolate in Certain Circumstances, Group Apostolate, The Various Types of Group Apostolate, The Catholic Action and the last number of this chapter closes with the Special Recommendation for the laity¹⁹; the text mentions two forms of apostolate: the individual and the group apostolate. These two forms of apostolate were developed into each specific area so that the chapter got six numbers.

Chapter V deals with the order of relationship between the lay people and the hierarchy and religious people. This chapter consists of four numbers: The relation of the laity with the hierarchy, with their pastors and with the religious, with special councils in dioceses and with the cooperation with other Christians and non-Christians²⁰; the text describes various kinds of relationship of the laity which implies the promotion of good cooperation with the hierarchy, with their pastors, with religious and the text ends with the recommendations to work together among Christians and members of other religions. This last part implicitly promotes the ecumenical view of the Decree which was later obviously more profound developed by the Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*.

The Last Chapter deals with the *Training for the Apostolate of Lay People* consisting in five numbers: The Need for Training, The Principles of Training, Those who

¹⁹ AA 15-21; Sauer, "The Council discovers the Laity", p. 238.

²⁰ AA 22-27; Sauer, "The Council discovers the Laity", p. 239.

Trains Others for the Apostolate, Fields Calling for Specialized Training, Aids to Training and the last number of the Decree closes with an exhortation²¹. In the older draft this last chapter was not a separated chapter as now in the final document but was included in chapter one related to Decree on Christian Education. The actual document deals with this in the last chapter for structural reasons to promote the apostolate of lay people obvious needs for an improved an integral formation for the laity in view of Christian Education. In their exhortation at the end of the Decree, the Fathers of the Council encourage the lay people to respond willingly to their calling to this apostolate and they are also hopeful that “the young people might acknowledge that this is also addressed to them”²².

3. Analyses of the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*

From chapter one to the last chapter the sense of the Decree is based in the theological view of the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* and the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* also shaped from this document. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, reflects on the laity in two important parts: Chapter Two and Chapter Four of the document contains a theological profound reflection regarding to the laity. Massimo Faggioli observed that the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* is grounded theologically, not juridically, or canonically. The focus on the theological approach can be seen in the emphasis on “the identity of the lay people, that is, the rights,

²¹ *AA* 28-33.

²² *Ibid.*

duties and opportunities for the activity of laity in the church”²³. The Decree describes what the lay people “do” in the church and even more, only the Decree affirms very clear the associations of lay people in the church in form of the *Catholic Action*. On the other side, the Pastoral Constitution *Lumen Gentium* just describes them as movements and does not describe them specifically, leaving it to the Decree for later clarification²⁴.

The purpose of the scheme of the *Apostolate of Laity* can be expressed in two points which Cardinal Cento, as the chairperson of the commission, formulated when he addressed the assembly in the first discussion. He stated that the Decree has the purpose given to it by the Popes John XXIII and Paul VI: First, it is “closely linked to the pastoral concern of the council”. All the faithful are called through baptism to participate in all levels of the mission of the Church together with the hierarchy in serving the Reign of God; the second aspect is related to “the ecumenical spirit”. All Christian believers are conferred the grace of baptism and are animated by the Holy Spirit and drawn to accept the Gospel and they are called to spread the Good News to the end of the world through their witness and mutual cooperation²⁵. This ecumenical spirit is explicitly expressed as above mentioned in the last number of Chapter V of the Decree and is also clearly recorded in the Decree on *Ecumenism*.

The Lay People and their role are discussed in many other documents of the Second Vatican Council, beside the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem: Lumen Gentium, Sacrosanctum Concilium, Presbyterorum Ordinis, Ad Gentes, Gaudium et Spes* deal with

²³ Faggioli, “Between Documents and Spirit: The Case of the New Catholic Movements”, 1-12, p. 6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Sauer, “The Council Discovers the Laity”, p. 235.

issues related to the laity. In the document *Lumen Gentium* the Fathers of the council laid the theological basis for the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*: They successfully put the laity back properly to the people of God in chapter II and they also articulated successfully in chapter IV about the laity as full members of the people of God who are incorporated into Christ and who share in his priesthood of all people of God and “the laity have a wide responsibility in the life of the church and the world”²⁶. In accord with the increased role of the lay people to exercise their duties in the church and the world, more profound details to it can be found in the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* through their engaged union with the hierarchy²⁷. The ecclesiological perspective of the relation between the laity and the hierarchy presented by *Lumen Gentium* and the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* is understood in the way of promotion of a good cooperation among all members of the church on all levels as envisioned by the Council. The basis of this relationship of both documents, as just mentioned, is to stress continuously the proper autonomy of the role of the Lay People²⁸.

Sacrosanctum Concilium deals also with the laity and emphasizes their active participation in liturgical celebrations in the church: Lay People are called to a full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy, a participation which is demanded by the nature of the liturgy²⁹. The Decree *Ad Gentes* reaffirms the calling of lay people to lead

²⁶ Gerald O’Collins & Edward G. Farrugia, “Laity”, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*: Revised and Expanded Edition (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2001), 133-134, p. 133.

²⁷ Cf. Luis Ligier, “Lay Ministry and Their Foundations in the Documents of Vatican II”, *Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty Five Years After (1962-1987)*, Vol. II, René Latourelle (ed.) (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989), 160-176, p. 161.

²⁸ Cf. Giovanni Turbanti, “A Autonomia dos Leigos da *Lumen Gentium* à *Gaudium et Spes*”, *Os Leigos depois do Concílio: A Identidade e a Missão Cristãos*, Cettina Militello (Cor.) (Bolonha: Paulinas, 2012), 11-55, p. 33.

²⁹ SC 14.

their life in holiness through spiritual exercises and also exhorts the lay people to fulfill their duty in the Church and world³⁰. The last document of the Second Vatican Council is the Decree *Gaudium et Spes* which has also a strong focus on the nature and mission of the laity in the world, specifically in two points: The first is that the laity have to take the initiative in the transformation of the temporal order³¹. And secondly, regarding the role of the laity, the Council accepts and encourages lay persons to pursue advanced studies in theology and Scripture³².

The spirit of the Second Vatican Council is grounded in the Church. Massimo Faggioli lists some New Catholics Movements considering themselves as fruits of Second Vatican Council: “Communion and Liberation like Community of St. Egidio, Focolare, Neocatechumenal, Cursillos de Cristiandad, Legionaries of Christ, and Charismatic Movements”³³.

The lay people and their mission gains continuously momentum and attention in the church: In 1989 “The Asian Bishops devoted the entire plenary assembly to discuss the vocation and mission of lay people in Asia”³⁴. Later the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference (VEC) also dealt with the theme of lay people, “the place and role of lay people”³⁵. Also the Encyclical *Christifideles Laici* focusses and deals exclusively with the

³⁰ *AG* 41.

³¹ *GS* 43.

³² *Ibid.*, 62.

³³ Faggioli, “Between Documents and Spirit: The Case of the New Catholic Movements”, 1-21, p. 1.

³⁴ Peter N. V. Hai, “Sentire cum Ecclesia: Laity and the Call to Holiness in Papal and Local Theology”, *Australian Records* (Sydney, July 2011), 333-348, p. 340, n. 28.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

vocation of lay people and their role in the Church in the contemporary world. His Holiness restated the theological foundation described in *Lumen Gentium* and the Decree *Apostolicam Actositatem*: His Holiness dealt with the communion of the members of the church and he used the biblical image “Christ true vine and his disciples are the branches in the vine, to explain the sacramental dignity, identity, participation and coresponsibility of lay people in the church”³⁶. In accord with the mystery of this communion, the Pontiff emphasized the participation of laity in the Priesthood of Christ in sacramental life³⁷.

³⁶ Quoted from Hai, “Sentire cum Ecclesia”, p. 339.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Cf. *LG 31; AA 3*.

CHAPTER TWO: THE CONCEPT OF LAITY AND MISSION AND THEIR THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

This chapter deals with three subtopics namely the general understanding both of laity and mission in the church and the last subtopic describes the theological basis of the participation of the lay people in the mission of the church in the world.

A. The Concept of Laity as Envisioned by the Second Vatican Council

Let us first take a look at the origin and development of the word “laity”. In the Bible: “to designate Israel as God’s chosen people, the Hebrew OT uses ‘*am*’, a word translated in the Septuagint by *laos*” (Ex 19:3-7; Dt 7:6; 14:2)³⁸. Thus, in the OT and NT the two words *am* and *laos* have the same meaning and are used to design all people of the covenant. The NT also emphasizes this element but later it changed for emphasizing “if as the former as the real church”³⁹. Later in the church used the word *laos* to designate those members who contrast with their leaders of community.

Karl Rahner in his book *Theological Investigation Volume II “Man in the Church”* observed that the understanding of the church on the “laity” in the old *Codex Iuris Canonici* of 1917 was narrow: This old Canon Law defined the laity as those who are powerless and linked to the secular realm in a negative view⁴⁰. According to some

³⁸ Gerals O’Collins, S.J. & Edward Farrugia, S.J. (eds.), “Laity”, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology: Revised and Expanded Edition* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2001), 133-134, p. 133.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Karl Rahner, “Notes on the Lay Apostolate”. *Theological Investigation: Man in the Church*, Karl H. Kruger (trans.), Vol. II, (London: Helicon Press, 1963), p. 319.

scholars: like Rahner and Keightley, these descriptions were too narrow and conveyed a rather “negative” view point because the Canon stated that the lay people are just seen by their secular status as being separated from the other members of the church⁴¹. As one consequence of this view and submission follows that the lay people were understood only to be passive contributors in witnessing to the Good News in the world. Thus, they considered themselves as being not really responsible for the mission of the church, which is seen mainly to be a task of clerics and religious. All important issues in the church are determined by clerics, those members who are entrusted with real power in the church. This subordinate perspective does not reflect the true nature of the church and of its members as being united in “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph. 4:4)⁴².

According to Karl Rahner, the Laity should be defined in a wider perspective and this should be understood in two points: Firstly, the laity are the faithful in the world and the second point puts the focus on their ecclesiological role⁴³. The Laity as living in the world express certainly the root of their status and mission, said Rahner. They are mankind placed in the world primarily as members of the society who have a responsibility towards the world and in the same time they have to be recognized properly as members of the Church who have a specific ecclesiological mission in the world for which they received the grace in Baptism from Christ by the Church⁴⁴.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 320; Georgia M. Keightley, “Laity”, *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins & Dermot A. Lane (eds.) (Pasay, Philippines: Saint Paul Publications, 1991), 558-563. p. 560.

⁴² Keightley, “Laity”, p. 558.

⁴³ Rahner, “Notes on the Lay Apostolate”, p. 322.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

The understanding about the Laity in ecclesiological perspective can be expressed in the following dimensions: “The Laity are the People called by God and they are rendering the grace of God through the sacrament of Baptism and in Confirmation which confirm them to take part in the mission of the church in the world”⁴⁵. And by receiving the sacrament of confirmation all members of the church, the ministers and also the lay people are empowered to live according to the grace of God not only through the exercise of official offices like the clerics but also through the received chrisms exercised by the Laity⁴⁶. The laity, as full members of the Church share necessarily co-responsibility in the mission of the Church with the ministers and religious people and they share this responsibility fully in the Church. Therefore the laity can also be assigned specific offices in the Church: as catechists, lectors, in the field of education, the right to assist in the administration of church property etc.⁴⁷.

The concept of laity in the church changed later and expressing a positive view in the Second Vatican Council in the Pastoral Constitution *Lumen Gentium* by stating that “The church consists of all members of the church, all people of Church not just the hierarchy”⁴⁸. Furthermore, the Fathers of the Council reemphasize the laity according to the biblical and the Patristic view, as:

“[...] all faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state approved by the church. That is the faithful who by baptism are incorporated into Christ, are placed in the people of God, and in their own way share the

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 325; Cf. Paul Bernier, *Ministry in the Church: A Historical and Pastoral Approach* (New London: Twenty-third Publications, 2006), p. 31.

⁴⁷ Rahner, “Notes on the Lay Apostolate”, p. 327.

⁴⁸ *LG* 9.

priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the church and in the world⁴⁹”.

B. The Concept of Mission as Envisioned in the Second Vatican Council

The word *mission* derives from the Latin word “*mittere*” which means “to send”⁵⁰. Commonly this definition expresses three elements contained in the word *mission*: the agent who sends, the receiver to whom something is sent, and the thing sent.

In the Church the word *mission* can be understood in two different senses, in a narrower sense and in a broader sense: The first or narrow sense relates to the specific missionary activities of the church addressed to those people and cultures still not directly affected by the Good News. The second sense refers basically to “everything that the church does in service of the Kingdom of God”⁵¹. This definition shows us that the mission of the church refers to both activities of the church realized within the church and outside the church. All activities of the Church are to nourish the faith of its members so that they can know more about what they believe and realize their mission as full members of the church in the world. And the mission related towards the world is to present the salvation of God to all nations and their cultures so that the salvation of God can reach them all.

⁴⁹ LG 31.

⁵⁰ George M. Greenewald, “Missions, Divine”, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. VIII (New York et al.: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1967), 928-930, p. 928.

⁵¹ William Mc Conville, OFM, “Mission”. *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins & Dermot A. Lane (eds.) (Collegeville, Minnesota: 1991), 664-668, p. 668.

All missionary perspectives of the Church have their origin in the Trinitarian Mission which is also called *Missio Dei*, the Divine Mission, and which is shown that the Father sent His Beloved Son Jesus Christ into the world. And after accomplishing his mission he sent the Holy Spirit to his followers⁵². Jesus Christ was travelling around Palestine to proclaim the Kingdom of God with the purpose to call people to conversion (Matt 4:17; Mark 1: 14-15). Jesus cured the sick (Matt 4:23-25; Luke 4:38-41; John 4:46-54; 5:1-9) and invited the sinners (Matt 9: 9-13; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 7:36-58). He summoned all people towards him (John 10:16; 12:20-21) etc. He was determined for the greater mission of the Kingdom of God (Cf. Luke 4:18). The Church designates him as the first missionary to proclaim the Kingdom of God and he became the model of the mission of the Church⁵³. Jesus invited all people to participate in his mission by choosing first the twelve apostles to preach and witness the Good News and serve others in love (Matt. 4,17-22; Mark 1,14-20; Luke 5,1-11) etc. To continue his mission, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit (John 15:26; 16:5-15) which was realized in the Pentecost. The Holy Spirit dwells upon the Church to empower all members to manifest the presence of God through Christ within the mission of the Church in the World⁵⁴.

Vatican II developed a profound understanding about the mission of the Church which laid the foundation towards a renewed comprehension of mission after the Council⁵⁵. Several documents of the Council are dealing with mission and are worth

⁵² AG 4; Cf. Greenewald, "Mission", p. 928.

⁵³ John Paul II, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 8.

⁵⁴ LG 14.

⁵⁵ Cf. Mc Conville, "Mission", p. 666.

mentioning here: The Document *Lumen Gentium* presents Mission in an ecclesiological perspective⁵⁶. The Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* focuses on the calling of lay faithful to the apostolate: all baptized are called to take actively part in the mission of the Church towards the world⁵⁷. The Decree *Ad Gentes* focuses explicitly and comprehensively on the Missionary Activity of the Church in the World⁵⁸.

The Decree *Ad Gentes* reflects on some dimensions of the mission as envisioned by the Vatican II: first of all it defines that “the church by itself is missionary”⁵⁹. Secondly, the document realizes that in certain times the mission was understood seemly narrower and linked mission primarily with the planting of new churches and proclaiming the Gospel to those who do not yet know it⁶⁰. The third dimension reflects the universal mission of the church referring to the empowering of local churches to participate actively in the mission of the church. The fourth dimension of the Decree reflects on the mission as inculturation⁶¹.

C. The Theological Foundation of the Mission of Lay People

The apostolate of the laity within the mission of the church is fully expressed in the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* when it states:

⁵⁶ *LG* 1, 17.

⁵⁷ *AA* 1.

⁵⁸ *AG* 1.

⁵⁹ *AG* 2; *LG* 1.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶¹ *AA* 22; Cf. Julian Saldanha, “Vatican II and the Principle of Inculturation”, *Vatican II: A Gift and A Task*, Jacob Kavunkal, Errol D’Lima, Evelyn Monteiro (eds.) (Bombay: St. Pauls, 2006), 195-21, p. 199.

“From the fact of their union (laity) with Christ the head flows right and duty of the laity to be Apostles. Inserted as they are in the Mystical Body of Christ by Baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit in confirmation, it is by the Lord himself that they are assigned to the Apostolate”⁶².

1. The Origin of the Mission of the Laity in the Calling of God

The mission of the faithful in the Church including the Lay People has its primary origin in the calling of God in being sent by him for a specific purpose⁶³. The second chapter of *Lumen Gentium* says clearly that the calling of God extends to all people through Christ: “He called a race made up of Jews and gentiles which would be one, not according to flesh, but in the spirit and this race would be the new people of God”⁶⁴. God calls all people to be in union with him as manifested in the most outstanding way in the sending of his beloved Son Jesus Christ⁶⁵. This view expresses exactly the true meaning of the Christian vocation and it relates to the principal content of the Christian mission. Every vocation in the church is related to her overall mission and is inclusive, for every member of the church is called to participate in the plan of God which is addressed to every individual Christian and to the world as a whole⁶⁶. To be a Christian is the vocation of being called by God in different ways of life through the experiences and life events and the witnesses of others⁶⁷. This calling of God manifests

⁶² AA 3.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁴ LG 9.

⁶⁵ M.M. Philipom, O.P., *The Sacrament in the Christian Life*, trans. John Otto (Westminster/Maryland: The New Man Press, 1955), p. 26.

⁶⁶ Cf. Humphrey Chinedu Anameje, “Contemporary Theological Reflection on the Laity: Towards a More active Participation in the Mission of the Church,” *Ephemerides Theologiae Lovanienses*” 83/4 (2007) 445-470, p. 446; O’Meara, *Theology of Ministry*, p. 210.

⁶⁷ Thomas F. O’Meara, O.P., *Theology of Ministry*, Completely Revised Edition (New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1999), p. 209.

the involvement of two different “partners”, for God is transcendent, the Creator, who calls humans as his creatures to have communion with Him. The calling of God to be a Christian entails the free acceptance of the grace of God to participate in the project of God for the overall human liberation.

John O’Meara, O.P., Professor of Catholic Theology at the University of Notre Dame, argues that the Christian vocation can be understood in two perspectives: the first or traditional perspective is vocation understood as a holy calling by God for a proper mission which is usually referred to the religious and clerical vocation⁶⁸. Here the Christian vocation is limited to a specific group of people. Professor Lakeland states in his recent book *A Council that will Never End* that this understanding of vocation brings a rather “negative” aspect with it for it refers exclusively to religious life and the ordained ministries of the church⁶⁹, and thus limits the understanding and scope of the Christian vocation to them. Promoting a second perspective, O’Meara argues, in accordance with the above mentioned idea of Lakeland, that the general Christian vocation should be understood in a broader perspective as a holy task to take part in the overall plan of God in one’s Christian life⁷⁰.

Primarily, every calling from God is addressed to the individual person because God calls each person individually but this experience of God cannot be appropriated comprehensively by individuals alone for He calls to live in communion with him and

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁶⁹ Lakeland, *A Council that will Never End*, p. 74.

⁷⁰ O’Meara, *Theology of Ministry*, p. 208.

with one another⁷¹. As just as the love of God extends to everyone, the living God shares His love with every person to make each person to live in communion with Him and with others so that this love of God never ends but continues without end⁷². The Christian faithful are invited to share the love of God with others to form the community of the people of God in the church so that she becomes the sacramental communion and the sign of unity embracing all cultures and all people⁷³.

The experience of the communion with others as people of God expresses explicitly another important dimension of the Christian vocation and this is the will of God as the Decree *Apostolicam* described “... it has been God’s pleasure to assemble those who believe in Christ and make them the people of God (cf. 1 Pet. 2:5-10), a single body” (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12). Each person is called by God to become a Christian by uniting him/herself with Christ and with the faithful in the Church by being members of the Mystical Body of Christ. In this communion each member contributes actively individually and in communities to build up the Church as Saint Paul says “every member of the Church contributes according to his/her possibilities for the edification of the Church” (Eph. 4:16). The exercise of the communal and individual mission by each faithful in the Church has its origin in the will of God as Saint Paul says “God has established some of them as apostles, others prophets and teachers” (1 Cor 3:6). The vocation of the Christian faithful including the Laity to be members of the Church

⁷¹ Cf. Anameje, “Contemporary Theological Reflection on the Laity”, p. 446.

⁷² Cf. Niceta Vargas, *Word and Witness: An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2013), p. 2.

⁷³ Cf. Evelyn Monteiro, “Church as Community and Communion”, *Vatican II: A Gift and A Task*, 80-99, p.80.

and to take fully part in her mission is confirmed and nourished through the sacramental life, towards which we turn in the next subchapter.

2. The Foundation of the Mission of the Laity in the Sacramental Life

God calls every one to be his daughter or son, and for the Christian the calling is confirmed later in being united with Christ in the church through the sacraments. Thus, the apostolate of the lay people derives from the sacraments of Christian initiation⁷⁴. The sacraments of Christian initiation incorporate not only the faithful into Christ and his Church but give them also a mission because the Church was instituted for her mission⁷⁵. Thus those, who become her members, are automatically united with her mission.

The sacraments of Christian initiation are the sacrament of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist⁷⁶. These three sacraments were instituted by Christ to confer graces to the believers for their journey of life and faith within the Church. By the grace of these sacraments of Christian initiation the Christian faithful are inserted into the church, the Body of Christ. Therefore, they enjoy fully their rights and responsibilities in the church.

Some theologians relate the Baptism of Jesus with his missionary proclamation of the Kingdom of God⁷⁷. The Synoptic Gospels tell us that after the Baptism, Jesus begun actively to announce the Kingdom of God around Palestine (Matt 4:12-17; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:14-15). The mission of Christ consisted in his preaching of the Kingdom of God

⁷⁴ AA 3; LG 11; O'Meara, *Theology of Ministry*, p. 199.

⁷⁵ LG 17; AG 1-2.

⁷⁶ CCC 1285.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 1214; Hanley, *The Life of the Mystical Body*, p.143.

and finds its final and perfect expression in his Passion and death on the Cross. In his passion, Jesus Christ communicates to the Church and the world his mission of perfect love. Saint Ambrose described fittingly the interconnection between the passion of Christ and Christian Baptism: “see where you are baptized, see where baptism comes from, if not from the Cross of Christ, from his death. There is the whole mystery: He died for you. In him you are redeemed, in him you are saved”⁷⁸.

The Church teaches that Christian Baptism is not a sacrament of individual affairs but it unites with Christ and inserts the faithful into the community of believers with a specific mission⁷⁹. In accordance with this teaching, Hanley expresses that the sacrament of Baptism “confers a receptive power to take part actively and intentionally in the Church,”⁸⁰ which means that by the grace of baptism the faithful are incorporated into Christ and therefore have a right to access other sacraments and to become responsible for the mission of the church.

The sacrament of Baptism confers to each Christian faithful the grace of Sanctification which is constituted in a twofold way, as Adoptive Grace and as Redemptive Grace⁸¹. Through Baptism all sins are forgiven, the original sin and the actual sins are removed. It takes every baptismal faithful out from the state of sinners and adds him/her to the state of grace to become united with God⁸². They render

⁷⁸ CCC 1225, n. 25.

⁷⁹ Charles Davis, *Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism and Confirmation* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1946), p. 80.

⁸⁰ Hanley, *The Life of the Mystical Body*, p.134.

⁸¹ CCC 1262.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 1263.

this divine grace which makes them children of God because baptismal grace elevates them from human dignity to divine dignity. This grace of sanctification effects the rebirth of the Christian faithful in the Holy Spirit so that they begin their new life as members of the Church with Christ as the head⁸³. This incorporation is eternal for baptism seals in the baptized a permanent character. They were baptized in the name of the Trinity who transforms the faithful into the living temple of the Holy Spirit⁸⁴.

The aspect of Redemptive grace means that Baptismal grace redeems each baptized from the consequences of sins which is separation from God due to death⁸⁵. In baptism, God, through his Beloved Son, redeems the baptized through the Holy Spirit to accomplish the salvation offered by God. Saint Thomas describes this form of grace more profoundly as redemptive grace, as a paying for our salvation: “The Passion of Christ is communicated to every baptized person so that he is healed just as if he himself had suffered and died...”⁸⁶.

The sacrament of confirmation strengthens the Christian faithful, says Hanley, for the sacrament of Confirmation the Christian faithful obtain the completion of baptismal grace⁸⁷. In the Church this sacrament is usually conferred to adult faithful who have been baptized. By this sacrament the faithful are conferred the Holy Spirit and the confirmed faithful receive the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit according to the teaching

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 1275.

⁸⁴ Philipom, *The Sacrament in the Christian Life*, p. 24.

⁸⁵ Cf. Hanley, *The Life of Mystical Body*, p. 146.

⁸⁶ Quoted From Hanley, *The Life of the Mystical Body*, p. 146.

⁸⁷ CCC 1285.

of the church: the Spirit of Fear, Fortitude, Piety, Counsel, Knowledge, Understanding, and Wisdom⁸⁸. These conferred gifts of the Holy Spirit perfect the faithful and they are now confirmed to be true soldiers of Christ which means to be able to defend the Christian faith and to give witness to it as Christian faithful in their family and parish community, in the church, country and the whole world. Hence, “in the confirmation the Christian faithful do not only pronounce their faith in the church but it is the time to do, to bring up their faith in accordance with the Holy Spirit”⁸⁹.

Charles and Philipon related the Christian confirmation with the Baptism of Jesus and with the experience of Pentecost which occurred in the time of the apostles⁹⁰. One title of Jesus, Messiah, means the “Anointed one by God”. Charles expressed that in his baptism, Jesus was anointed again to initiate his public mission and he himself declared it officially when he was preaching in the Synagogue (cf. Luke 4:16-21)⁹¹. Christ was anointed again publicly by his Father to initiate his public mission (cf. Matt 3:17 etc.)⁹².

The anointing as the experience of Pentecost can be understood in the following way: In the passion of Christ, the apostles experienced Gethsemany, they sensed the distance, they left Jesus and they felt the loss of the Lord: one of them, Peter denied his Lord three times (Matt. 26:69-75; Mark 14: 66-72; Luke 22:54-62) and the apostles were terrible afraid (John 20: 19-2). But later at the event of the Pentecost all of these

⁸⁸ Philipom, *The Sacrament in the Christian Life*, p. 48.

⁸⁹ Hanley, *The Life of the Mystical Body*, 172.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Davis, *Sacraments of Initiation*, p. 147.

⁹² CCC 1295.

experiences of Gethsemany; the doubts, fear, disappeared and were transformed into living experiences with the risen Lord, in the Holy Spirit in the community of the apostles (Acts 2: 1- 36ff). Philipon describes this experience of the Apostles as being anointed by God: “They were truly anointed in Pentecost”⁹³. God anointed them with the Holy Spirit which made them to leave behind all their doubts about Christ and they got the courage to preach openly and to give witness publicly (Acts 22: 42ff), and even when they were prohibited by the authorities they continued to preach the Gospel to all (cf. Acts 17:42ff). Thus, the sacrament of Confirmation makes the faithful to become co-workers within the overall mission of the Church.

In the Eucharist the faithful are united with Christ, they are invited to participate in the perfect communion with Christ, for Christ gives himself to them in his Body and Blood, as Christ unites himself with the Church becoming one Body of Christ. All sacraments in the Church communicate the grace of God to human beings but in the Eucharist this grace is explicitly manifest, for God continuous through his beloved Jesus Christ to give himself to the world through his Body and Blood. This particular Eucharistic dimension is distinguished from other sacramental celebrations that exist in the Church. According to the teaching of the Church the Eucharist is “the sacrament which completes Christian initiation”⁹⁴, for in the Eucharist the Christian faithful become one Body with Christ in the perfect sacrifice offered by Christ to God on the cross once and forever⁹⁵. To participate in the Eucharist means to participate in the living God

⁹³ Philipom, *The Sacrament in the Christian Life*, p. 49.

⁹⁴ CCC 1322.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

because through Christ and his Body and Blood God communicates with the world his life which guarantees eternal life. Philipon describes this grace obtained by the faithful in the Eucharist as the grace of “transformation into Christ”⁹⁶. The grace of the Eucharist brings all those who participate in this grace with Christ and he transforms the souls of the faithful into the living temple of the Holy Trinity.

The sacrament of the Eucharist is a daily celebration of the paschal mystery of Christ in the Church. Christ is present in all the sacraments, in ministry, in his Word, in the liturgical celebration, in the community of believers, in the poor and he is present in the Eucharistic celebration⁹⁷. His continuing presence in the world among his faithful is realized through his presence in the sacramental species of his Body and Blood, said Saint Thomas⁹⁸. Christ gives himself to the faithful believers as the “food” from heaven with which he nourishes and guides them on their journey to eternity meaning the Eucharist is the spiritual food given to the souls of the faithful, to strengthen their lives and mission in the world and for the pledge of the glory to come, in union with God⁹⁹.

The description of the Eucharist above mentioned points to the teaching of the Church that is the fount and the center of the life of the Church: “all of the ecclesiastical tasks and others sacraments are pointed and oriented to it¹⁰⁰. Therefore, the Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis* affirms that “No community can be built up unless it has basis

⁹⁶ Philipom, *The Sacrament in the Christian Life*, p. 92.

⁹⁷ SC 7.

⁹⁸ Quoted From Hanley, *The Life of the Mystical Body*, 192.

⁹⁹ CCC 1402.

¹⁰⁰ CCC 1324.

and center in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist”¹⁰¹. This experience allows us to reflect on the necessity of the Eucharist, as daily food for the Christian which transforms them into His disciples for the Kingdom of God¹⁰², who serve others as Jesus did, “the one in our midst who serves us” (Cf. Luke 22:27)¹⁰³.

¹⁰¹ *PO* 5.

¹⁰² *AG* 39.

¹⁰³ Philip Van Linden, C.M., *The Gospel of Luke and Acts: Message of Biblical Spirituality* 10 (Wilmington/Delaware: Glazier, 1986), p. 2.

CHAPTER THREE: THE MISSION OF THE LAY PEOPLE AND ITS CHALLENGES

Chapter three is the last of this research dealing with two important sub-topics, namely with the specific nature of the mission of the lay faithful of the church in the world and the contemporary challenges of their mission in the world today.

A. The Lay People and their Specific Mission in the Church and in the World

The Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* mentions explicitly that the participation of the laity in the mission of the Church derives from their sharing in the Priesthood of Christ: By the grace of God in Christ through the sacraments, especially baptism, all lay faithful share in the proper manner in the priesthood of Christ. Therefore, also the laity are assigned to exercise the Priestly, Kingly and Prophetic office of Christ in the Church and in the world¹⁰⁴.

The incorporation into the Body of Christ in faith through the sacraments and specially Christian Baptism is the unique source of the common priesthood of the people of God¹⁰⁵. The theologian Paul Lakeland describes this in his commentary on the Priesthood of the laity according to Vatican II and he affirms that the Priesthood of the

¹⁰⁴ AA 2.

¹⁰⁵ Kevin John MC Namara, "Lay Priesthood", *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. VIII (New York et al.: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), 578-580, p. 580.

Laity has its origin directly in the Priesthood of Christ, not in the hierarchical priesthood¹⁰⁶. The engagement of the laity in the mission of the church is bound with their union with Christ as the head of the Church.

1. The Priestly Mission of the Laity

Christ continues to exercise his priestly mission in the Church through his ministries of the Church: The ordained ministers, the religious people and the lay faithful¹⁰⁷. Through the Holy Order Christ assigned some men from the people of God to exercise his priestly, kingly and prophetic office in the Church¹⁰⁸.

The lay faithful are also called to exercise the priestly mission of Christ. The priestly mission of the laity is founded in the sacrament of baptism as Saint Augustine said “all those who are baptized into Christ are called priests, because thereby they are members of the one priest”¹⁰⁹. By the virtues of the sacraments Christian initiation all faithful are fully consecrated and incorporated into Christ as the people redeemed by Christ. The Document *Lumen Gentium* affirms: “To those whom he intimately joins to his life and mission he also gives a share in his priestly office, to offer spiritual worship for the glory of the Father and the salvation of humanity”¹¹⁰.

¹⁰⁶ Lakeland, *The Council that Never Ends*, p. 12; *AA*, 34-36; Jose Comblin, *People of God*, ed. & trans. Philip Berreman (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Book, 2004), p. 17.

¹⁰⁷ Michael J. Himes, “What can we learn from the Church in the Nineteenth Century?”, *The Catholic Church in the 21st Century: Finding Hope for its Future in the Wisdom of the Past*, eds. Michael J. Himes, Daniel J. Harrington et al. (Liguori, Missouri: Catholic Community Foundation, 2004), 65-79, p. 76.

¹⁰⁸ *PO* 2.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted from James Edward Rea, S.T.D., *Common Priesthood of the Mystical Body* (New York: The Newman Bookshop, 1947), p. 216, n. 30.

¹¹⁰ *LG* 34.

Michael Himes, Professor of Catholic Theology at Boston College, says that the priestly mission in the church refers to “the essential exercising task of fostering holiness, the building up of the spiritual life in individuals and communities”¹¹¹. Thus, through the sacrament of baptism, power is conferred to all Christian faithful believers to nourish their faith and to worship the triune God in their daily life. The task to bring life into the holiness pertains to all Christian believers: it is the vocation of the entire people of God as expressed in the invitation by Christ “Be holy as your Father in Heaven is Holy” (Mt 5:48). The Lay People exercise their priestly mission by living this call of God through daily spiritual exercises in prayer, contemplation and fasting, which helps them to reach holiness in life¹¹². This is the daily calling of the laity which unites them with Christ who sacrificed himself for the service of all human beings. Through this, the laity dedicate their life and themselves to the service of the Kingdom of God as a manifestation of their spiritual offering to the living God.

The exercise of the Priestly Mission of the Laity is also manifest in the Holy Eucharistic celebration¹¹³. The Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* affirms that the laity are called to a full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy, a participation which is demanded by the nature of the liturgy¹¹⁴. The holy Eucharist is the final goal of the church to show the presence of Jesus Christ at the holy altar of God. The ordained priest celebrates the Eucharist and the baptized Christians share in that mysterious act of God

¹¹¹ Himes, “What can we learn from the Church in the Nineteenth Century?”, p. 76.

¹¹² Cf. Mc Namara, “Lay Priesthood”, p. 579.

¹¹³ Daughters of Saint Paul, *The Dimension of the Priesthood: Theological, Christological, Liturgical, Ecclesial, Apostolic and Marian* (Boston: St. Paul Edition, 1973), p. 213.

¹¹⁴ SC 14.

during that celebration by their conscious and full participation in it. The ordained priest as the leader of the community offers the Eucharistic sacrifice not by his own name but in the name of the local community and together with the whole community of the entire people of God. The priest offers the sacrifice in the name of the community as Christ as the head of the Body of the Church who offers his life for the redemption of all His members¹¹⁵. That is why, by the participation in this celebration, the laity are called to offer their sacrifice together with the offering of the ordained priest to God. The priestly gift of the laity has its fulfillment in the ultimate sharing in the holy Eucharist celebrated by the ordained priest¹¹⁶.

Hence, the participation of the lay faithful in the priestly mission of Christ finds its expression in their daily spiritual exercises to live a life in holiness through faith and in offering their daily life in prayer, charity and in service to others in love and in the active participation of the Eucharistic celebration which helps the laity to lead their life according to the will of God in holiness.

2. The Kingly Mission of the Laity

There are some images in the NT which present the Kingship of Christ: first of all I may refer to the letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians describing the Supremacy of Christ (Col. 1:15-20). Secondly, other narratives describe Jesus as King of kings

¹¹⁵ Daughters of Saint Paul, *The Dimension of the Priesthood*, p. 214.

¹¹⁶ Cf. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 30.

(Mt 2:1-2; 21:5; Mark 15:26; Luke 1:32-33; Jo 12:13; Rev 17:14)¹¹⁷. Jesus was anointed by God Father with the power during his public ministry and he exercised it by serving others as a true servant, as he himself said: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom of many” (Mt 20:27-28; Mark 10:4; Lc 22:24-27; Jo 13:13-14). God has revealed His son to us who becomes instrumental for serving humanity and for its salvation.

The Church is called to serve and to witness the Kingdom of God. The Document *Lumen Gentium* describes exactly the duty of lay people in building up the Kingdom of God by stating that “The Lord also desires that his kingdom be also spread by lay faithful: the kingdom of truth and life, the kingdom of holiness and grace, the kingdom of justice, love and peace”¹¹⁸. This mission is given to the Church by Jesus to continue and to live her mission in the world (cf. Jo 13:15; Lc 22:24-30; Mt 23:18). From this it is clear for us that the calling of Christ to serve is addressed to all people of God: the lay people, the hierarchy and the religious people. Therefore, the ministry of the Church to serve does not limit it to the cult but extends this ministry to serve others and to serve the Kingdom of God, said Paul Bernier in his book *Ministry in the Church*¹¹⁹.

Christ confided to his Apostles the power for consecration and to rule the community of the people of God and this power was passed on to the Pope and

¹¹⁷ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Illustrated Jesus through the Centuries* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1997) p. 47.

¹¹⁸ LG 36.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Paul Bernier, *Ministry in the Church: A Historical and Pastoral Approach* (New London: Twenty-third Publications, 2006), p. 284.

bishops¹²⁰. In the Church this power of the sacred order also implies the power of the priests, bishops and the pope for consecration, teaching and governing¹²¹. The lay faithful also exercise these ministries in the Church in a proper way. All faithful exercise exactly this authority for the edification of the Mystical Body of Christ by serving others with love in which the one Christ continues to serve humanity. Hence, the duty of serving the Kingdom of God pertains also to the lay people and it is exercised in different ways among the people of God. The lay faithful are also called to serve the Kingdom of God through exercising their tasks together with the ordained ministry of the church which indicates already their serving character in the church with the one purpose of offering to the world the saving mission of Christ¹²². The calling of the laity to serve is the same calling of Jesus to the ordained priests whose gift of service is for the glory and Kingdom of God here on earth, the community of believers. The special calling of the lay people in the church does not compete with the service of the ordained priests, or religious, instead their service complements and fills up to the total mission of the Church to the world. There is an interrelatedness of the mission between the ordained ministry and the laity which manifests the common responsibility for the overall mission of the Church¹²³. All members of the church are partners within the overall mission for they share in their own way in the one ministry of Christ.

¹²⁰ . Mother E. O’Gorman, R.S.C.J., *Papal Teaching: Directives to Lay Apostolate* (trans.) Selected and arranged by The Benedictine Monk of Solesmes (Jamaica Plain, Boston: Saint Pauls Editions, 1963), p. 524.

¹²¹ *Christus Dominus* 2.

¹²² *LG* 12.

¹²³ Anameje, “Contemporary Theological Reflection on the Laity”, p. 449.

On the pastoral level, this sharing ministry becomes clearer. Saint John Paul II, in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, encourages the hierarchy to share their office ministry with all the faithful in the Church by establishing *Diocesan Pastoral Councils* to integrate a pattern of shared ministry of the bishop, his priests and the lay faithful in the Diocese¹²⁴. This common structure will foster collaboration in the laity and deepen their participation in all aspects of the local Church. The sharing ministry among the ordained ministry and the lay people for serving the faithful of the community is another aspect of this communal mission. From this, it becomes clear that the laity are fulfilling their call of the kingly mission by making a great contribution in witnessing the Kingdom of God on earth¹²⁵.

The Pastoral Constitution *Lumen Gentium* links also the kingship of the laity with the spiritual dimension by addressing the spiritual combat in which they seek to overcome in themselves the kingdom of sin so that they can serve truly God and their brothers and sister in love and justice¹²⁶. James Dallen, the author of *Reconciling Community*, affirms according to the teaching of the Church, that there are two sacraments which give the power of kingship to all faithful believers, namely, the sacrament of Baptism and the sacrament of Reconciliation¹²⁷. In both sacraments Christ defeats the power of sin by purifying and sanctifying the baptized faithful. Thus, this victory of the Risen Christ over the power of death is shared with all his followers,

¹²⁴ Cf. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 25.

¹²⁵ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 31.

¹²⁶ Cf. *LG* 36.

¹²⁷ James Dallen, *The Reconciling Community: The Rite of Penance* (Studies in the Reformed Rite of the Catholic Church) Vol. III (Collegeville Minnesota: A Pueblo Book, 1991), p. 85.

the baptized faithful, in those sacraments¹²⁸. The grace of baptism confers to the lay faithful the power to become Children of God, for they were baptized into the death of Christ and rose with him (Rom 6:1-14). In baptism therefore the baptized are vested with the royal ministry of Christ. The Baptized are now governed by the grace of God, meaning the baptized left the “old man” and they have become now the holy people of God belonging to the Mystical Body of Christ. Hence, they are freed from sin and death caused by sin so that they become free men and women who accept to witness the Kingdom of God.

The Baptized continue to exercise their spiritual kingship when receiving and celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation. Dallen affirms that the sacrament of reconciliation is somehow the second plank for the baptized faithful in which God gives back to them the spiritual kinship after baptism¹²⁹. Spiritually, because of sin, the baptized Christians broke their relationship with God after baptism but through celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation the baptized are reconciled again and again with God and with one another. The Second Vatican Council teaches that by approaching the sacrament of penance “the members of the Church also exercise this kingship in overcoming themselves the reign of sin”¹³⁰. The frequent attendance of the celebration of reconciliation gives a sense that Christ continues to share with each baptized his power over sin so that they are able to restore their life as the living temple of God because they are freed from the slavery of sin¹³¹.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 31.

¹³⁰ Dallen, *The Reconciling Community*, p. 85.

¹³¹ *LG* 36.

3. The Prophetic Mission of the Laity

The prophetic mission generally relates to the proclamation of the Good News. The proclamation of the Good News is the primary mission of Christ on earth and he did it through words and in deeds¹³². The scripture witnesses that Jesus began his preaching “do and to teach” in the beginning (Acts 1:1)¹³³. He proclaimed the Good News to the people by words when he was active preaching to the crowds on many occasions in the Temple (cf. Mt 7: 28-29; Mark 1:22; Luke 7:1). And Jesus exercised his prophetic mission by healing people (Mt 8:16; Mark 1:32-34; Luke 4:40-41) and having compassion with the poor people and being close to sinners (Luke 5:29-31; Mt 9:10-13).

The task to proclaim the Gospel is an essential part of the mission of the Church which is grounded in the obedience to the command of Jesus: “To go therefore into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15). In this light the Church is called to participate in the prophetic mission of Christ. The Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* affirms that the mission of all people of God is to sanctify the world through proclaiming the Good News¹³⁴. For the ordained ministry, the *Decree on the Priesthood* underlined their task of preaching the Gospel: “priests, as co-workers with their bishops, have as their primary duty the proclamation of the Gospel to all”¹³⁵. Following this thought also Federico Suarez emphasized in his book *About Being a*

¹³² Donald Senior, “Reign of God”, *The New Dictionary of Catholic Theology*, 851-860, p. 851.

¹³³ Federico Suarez, *About Being a Priest* (Dublin/Houston: Four Court Press & Lumen Christi Press, 1979), p. 39.

¹³⁴ AA 6.

¹³⁵ PO 4.

Priest and affirmed “The preaching of the word of God forms part, and an extremely important part, of the special mission of priest”¹³⁶. Like Suarez, also Avery Dulles, the author of *Models of the Church*, affirms: “The ordained ministry will be seen especially as preacher, and any sacramental functions he has viewed as a kind of prolongation of the ministry of the world”¹³⁷. Therefore, the life of the ordained ministry in the Church has to be seen as the ministry of the word and ministry of the cult.

For the laity, their prophetic mission is expressed clearly and fully in the Pastoral Constitution *Lumen Gentium* by stating that Christ shares his prophetic mission with all faithful believers: “Until the manifestation of his glory, Jesus fulfills his prophetic mission, proclamation of the Kingdom of God, not only by hierarchy who teach in his name and by his power, but also by the laity”¹³⁸.

The Document develops also the duty of the laity to exercise their prophetic mission of Christ in many aspects of life: As first aspect the document mentions the fruit of Christian baptism, that is how the People of God by the grace of baptism are called to spread their faith in Christ through their life of faith and in sacrifices as the ultimate result of what they are preaching and witnessing¹³⁹. By the grace of baptism the baptized faithful incorporates with Christ and initiates his/her journey of faith in the church.

As second aspect *Lumen Gentium* mentions the gifts of the Holy Spirit received in confirmation which sustain the Christian faithful to accept the truth of faith, meaning

¹³⁶ Suarez, *About Being a Priest*, p. 41.

¹³⁷ Avery Dulles, S.J., *Models of the Church* (Garden City, New York: Image Book, 1978), p. 175.

¹³⁸ LG 34.

¹³⁹ LG 12.

“the supernatural appreciation of faith of whole people, when, from the bishops to the last of the faithful they manifest an universal consent in matters of faith and morals”¹⁴⁰. Thus, by the grace of baptism and confirmation the laity are called to shine out their faith in the world as Christ proclaimed “you are the light of the world and the salt of the earth” (Mt 5:13-14). Through these gifts of the sacraments of Christian initiation God empowers the laity and will burn their heart to defend and to live out their faith as true witnesses of Christ in their whole life through word and deed¹⁴¹. A profound living of faith obviously enables the transformation of the individual and social life¹⁴².

As the third aspect, the document *Lumen Gentium* also mentions that the prophetic task of the laity can be exercised also in the family: The grace of the sacrament of marriage helps the spouses to live up their Christian life; their spiritual exercises, the good moral life can be a seed for faith, hope and love for their children in the family¹⁴³.

In the church the prophetic mission also relates to the power of teaching. According to the teaching of the Church, the power of teaching is primarily the task of the Pope and Bishops¹⁴⁴. Practically, also the laity in the Church share in the proper manner in “the power of teaching” with their Bishops¹⁴⁵: They share it practically as some lay faithful exercise tasks as a catechist in catechetical institutions in dioceses

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁴² James D. Whitehead & Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (Lanham et al.: Sheed & Ward, 1995), p. 86.

¹⁴³ *LG* 35.

¹⁴⁴ *Christus Dominus* 1-10; *AA* 14.

¹⁴⁵ *LG* 14.

or parishes, some lay people are even full theologians, teachers of seminarians and future ministers, priests and bishops, and other lay people are experts in social sciences and in various theological disciplines and assist the Church in the preparation of important doctrinal decisions¹⁴⁶. Here we see that the laity are exercising their prophetic task through the “power of teaching” among the people of God in the Church and are therefore important co-workers for truth.

B. The Lay Mission for the Transformation of the World and Its Challenges

The participation of the laity in the Priesthood of Christ has the special feature that they are called to exercise it in all aspects and dimensions in the World. Avery Dulles compares this ministry of the laity as to live out their faith in the world¹⁴⁷. The duty of the laity to transform the world continues the salvific mission of Christ said Michael J. Himes¹⁴⁸.

1. The Laity and the Transformation of the World

Chapter II of the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* presents comprehensively all the tasks of the Lay People in the World: The Decree points out that the main purpose of the mission of the laity in the world is to offer integral salvation of God to the world as Christ, our Lord, did by giving himself for the salvation of all.

“The work of the Christ’s Redemption concerns essentially the salvation of human beings; it takes also, however, the renewal of the whole of the temporal orders.

¹⁴⁶ Himes, “What can we learn from the Church in the Nineteenth Century?”, p. 76.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Dulles, *Models of the Church*, p. 179.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Himes, “What can we learn from the Church in the Nineteenth Century”, p. 76.

The mission of the Church, consequently, is not only to bring humanity the message and grace of Christ but also to permeate and improve the whole range of the temporal”¹⁴⁹.

The saving mission of Christ consists exactly in the offering of integrated salvation to the whole humanity and the entire temporal order. As disciples of Christ the lay faithful are called to take fully part within this holy mission according to their holy calling for the restoration of the world. His Holiness Pope Paul VI expressed that “the mission of the Church is supernatural one, however her mission is not purely religious, and should be rooted in the world”¹⁵⁰. His intention is clear that the saving mission of the Church should be an integrated mission, meaning the purpose of the salvation should include the temporal development of the world and the wellbeing of the whole mankind. And the other purpose refers to the evangelizing mission of the Church which should be offered respecting the challenge of inculturation so that “the Word of God should take root in the life-situation of the hearers of the World”¹⁵¹. In other words, faith should be expressed in each culture properly so that it becomes more understandable and authentically expressed as living faith¹⁵².

The involvement and contribution of the laity towards the improvement of the temporal order of the world becomes more and more important today. The Document *Lumen Gentium* emphasizes the special secular character of the laity related to the tasks

¹⁴⁹ AA 5.

¹⁵⁰ Quoted from Leslie Griffin, “The Integration of the Spiritual and Temporal: Contemporary Roman Catholic Church-State Theory” *Theological Studies* 48 (University of Notre Dame: 1987), 225-256, p. 234.

¹⁵¹ Richard R. Gaillardetz, “Shifting Meanings in the Lay-Clergy Distinction”, *Irish Theological Quarterly* 64 (1999), 115-139, p. 140.

¹⁵² Norman E. Thomas (ed.), *Classic Texts in Mission & World Christianity* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), p. 207.

in the temporal order¹⁵³. This special character of the laity makes indeed a great contribution to the mission of the church in the world. The lay people are placed in the world and therefore they have great opportunities in the society: in the economy, social-politics, culture, education etc. Some theologians, like Karl Rahner, Bruno Forte, rejected the idea of the secular character of laity because it seems to express a negative view point and the secular character, in fact, belongs to all people of God in the Church, since even the ordained ministers are placed into this world and their mission is also in and for the world, therefore the secular character belongs to all members of the Church not only to the laity. There are even some ordained ministers who work in a secular profession without ceasing their ministry¹⁵⁴.

For Ives Congar the secular character of laity should be understood in a positive way for their mission in the world makes a great contribution to the life and the mission of the Church in the secular world¹⁵⁵. Beyond this final contribution of the laity and basic office of the priesthood of laity, the dimension of the secular character of the laity cannot simply be seen as secularism, or as those who are fully dedicated to the secular issues by lacking proper attention to the spiritual dimension. They are exercising their duties together with people from different nations, religions, cultures, even unbelievers. The lay faithful are placed and are living in the secular world and they have the responsibility to perfect the world according to the spirit and values of the Gospel. They are assigned,

¹⁵³ Gaillardetz, “Shifting Meanings in the Lay-Clergy Distinction”, p. 122, n. 10.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Richard Lennan (ed.), *An Introduction to Catholic Theology* (New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1998), p. 173.

therefore, to proclaim the salvation of God in all spheres of secular life: In economics, politics, culture, hospitals, science and technology and all other secular aspects¹⁵⁶.

The progress and the development of the world in those aspects, as above mentioned, has a significant meaning, is bringing new and positive things into human life but it should also be realized that this progress causes harmful effects, like imbalances in various aspects of life¹⁵⁷ which affect for instance the destruction of creation with degrading effects on human life. Considering these circumstances, Saint John Paul II called urgently on the needy “action of the laity”, and stressing strongly that today “it is not permissible for anyone to remain idle”¹⁵⁸. The laity are therefore called to fulfill their specific mission in the church and in the world which means they are called to become “architects of God” in His creation¹⁵⁹.

The Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* affirms that the laity can fulfill this great task through “their apostolic activity either single or in groups in various communities or associations”¹⁶⁰. The baptized in any association or institution in the Church can live out their mission more effectively to evangelize without diminishing their individual witness¹⁶¹. The church recognized such lay associations, or lay movements historically

¹⁵⁶ *The Church in Asia in the 3rd Millennium: Guide Book on the Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Asia*, p. 50.

¹⁵⁷ James H. Kroeger & Peter C. Pan (eds.), *The Future of the Asian Church: The Asian Synod & Ecclesia in Asia* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2002), p. 48, no. 9.

¹⁵⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 3-4.

¹⁵⁹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 22.

¹⁶⁰ *AA* 15.

¹⁶¹ *Cf. Ibid*, 16.

in the form of the *Catholic Action*¹⁶². The mission of such group apostolate is very important for it reflects well the ecclesiological vision of unity and communion of the Church¹⁶³. Within the *Catholic Action*, the lay people have countless and great opportunities to exercise their apostolate of evangelization and sanctification because within it the lay faithful are joined together in an orderly way in their efforts for concerted action for their mission¹⁶⁴. Nowadays, the complexity and the wide areas of the secular world obviously require various forms of lay mission as group mission within different lay associations. Therefore, many lay movements emerged in the Church which make today a great contribution to her mission in the world: Focolare, New Catechumenate, Couple for Christ, Youth for Christ, the Catholic Students Associations on all levels of education, Basic Christian Communities etc.¹⁶⁵ Each movement has its own spirituality and way to build up the Church. All of these groups continue to give life to the mission of the Church with a style proper to the laity who constitute these lay associations. These lay associations play a greater role in the world in various dimensions: there are some lay movements encouraging their bishops to intervene in government affairs in view of more Justice¹⁶⁶, others are dealing with the great an

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Francisco F. Claver, S.J., *The Making of the Local Church* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications/Jesuits communications, 2009), p. 39.

¹⁶⁶ David Kaulemu, "Catholic Teaching at a Crossroad", *Catholic Theological Ethics Past, Present and Future: The Trento Conference*, James F. Keenan (ed.) (Bangalore: Theological Publication in India, 2011), 176-183, p. 177.

responsible task of education¹⁶⁷, and from the active movements of the *Basics Christian Communities* in Asia emerged many leaders out of the community of believers etc.¹⁶⁸.

These lay movements certainly enable fittingly the proclamation of the Gospel so that it reaches and permeates all parts and dimensions of the world: “The Gospel must be drawn into a dynamic interaction with the contemporary issues, for examples secularism, world poverty, ecological”¹⁶⁹. The very witness of a Christian life, and the good work accomplished in a supernatural spirit by members of the *Catholic Action*, are quite effective in drawing men and women to faith in God; and this is what the Lord has said: “Your light must shine so brightly before men that they can see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Mt 5:16). The renewal of the temporal order has been fittingly addressed by the Australian theologian Peter Price:

“The transformation of the world in the light of the condition of the ‘Reign of God’ in which all things enter in communion with the loving community and the divine *milieu* of justice, peace, reconciliation stewardship of the world and compassion for all beings rules the earth”¹⁷⁰.

2. The Challenges of the Mission of the Laity in the World Today

¹⁶⁷ Kevin M. Tidd, O.S.B., “The Evolution of ‘Association’ as a Model for Lay/Religious Collaboration in Catholic Education, Part II: The Emergence of Shared Mission as a Ministry Paradigm, 1986-2000”, *Catholic Education: A Journal and Practice*, Vol.12, No. 4 (Boston College: June, 2009), 439-447, p. 439-441.

¹⁶⁸ Calver, *The Making of the Local Church*, p. 107-123.

¹⁶⁹ Gerald A. Arbuckle, S.M., *Refunding the Church: Dissent for the Leadership* (Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1996), p. 4.

¹⁷⁰ Peter Price, “The Diaspora Church: Laity & ‘Laicity’ in Post-Vatican II”, *Pacifica* 62 (Australia, Melbourne, 2013), 184-198, p. 190.

This last topic of this research deals with the challenges facing the lay faithful in their participation in the mission of the Church and in fulfilling it in our world today. The relevance and challenges of the role of laity become even greater in the world today.

i. Facing the Pluralistic Globalized World in Dialogue

The world today is a complex society which is characterized by religious and cultural pluralism: The society consists neither of one culture nor of one religion. The mission in this world obviously becomes more and more difficult in view of evangelizing in a highly complex situation. Pope Francis notes that in this complexity of our modern society and its ongoing process of globalization challenges our society in many ways: “the economic exclusion; money becomes a new idol; the financial system becomes more a dominant ruler than a server, and the inequalities in the societies are continuously increasing”¹⁷¹.

Looking at these challenges facing the world require therefore a joint mission among the believers. According to Eugene Smith a communal mission is considered more effective and relevant¹⁷². The communal mission consists in two parts: the communal mission refers to the dimension of *intra ecclesia* and *extra ecclesia*. The dimension *intra ecclesia* is concerned with the communal mission in the Church: The laity are called to work in communion with the religious and ordained ministry for the good of the entire mission of the Church: the calling for communal mission is part of the relationality between the lay people, religious and the hierarchy. The task

¹⁷¹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 44-49.

¹⁷² Eugene Smith, “Individualistic Evangelism is Inadequate”, *Classic Texts in Mission & World Christianity*, 161-164, p.161-162.

of the ordained ministry is to foster this common mission with the laity because it reflects the image of the Church which is communal as the people of God¹⁷³. This communal mission fosters a good cooperation among the hierarchy and laity in all their apostolic activities: The hierarchy entrust them with apostolic activities in union with their pastors. The prompting of the laity engages them in manifold apostolic activities in parishes and dioceses, and beyond on the national and international level.

The other dimension of the communal mission facing the pluralistic world is the role of the laity regarding *extra ecclesia*: Here they have to cooperate with believers from other christian denominations, other religions, and also non believers¹⁷⁴. The lay mission *extra eclessia* faces religious pluralism which challenges them in their understanding and their tasks. We should realize that to promote a good human and societal development, the promotion of justice, human rights and peace are not only the duty of Christians but pertains principally to all people. Therefore, the Decree *Apostolate of Lay People* advocates that the laity work together with all those who have a good will on national and international levels for the common good¹⁷⁵. A good cooperation among believers requires attitudes and skills of dialogue, for instance by promoting helpful cooperations¹⁷⁶. Dialogue enables collaboration, harmony and

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁷⁴ Raimundo Panikkar, "Toward an Ecumenical Ecumenism", *Classic Texts in Mission & World Christianity*, Norman E. Thomas (ed.) (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 273-274, p. 273.

¹⁷⁵ *Cf. AA* 14.

¹⁷⁶ Sebastião D'Ambra, "Interreligious Dialogue in Asia", *The Future of the Asian Churches*, 110-114, p.110-111.

mutual enrichment and contributes to the common understanding and a more just and peaceful development of the world¹⁷⁷.

ii. The Mission of the Laity for the Poor People

One very important challenge for the mission of lay people today is charitable work with the poor people: the generous work and the compassion with the poor people. There is no doubt that in today societies fast and useful developments are occurring. However, this progress often does not benefit all people but creates “a second society”, a society of marginalized and poor people, shown in the imbalance of development in today societies, locally and globally: “There are many marginalized people behind the great globalization of the world today, they are called now to be the third world, and it is the poor that make up the majority of the population”¹⁷⁸. The Bishops of Asia remind us that the progress in the society today continues to marginalize the poor people: “The process of globalization tends to push poor countries and the poor people to the periphery”¹⁷⁹. There are a lot of people who live in misery of life: they lose their fundamental right to live in dignity.

The Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* reminds us that today these deplorable unjust and difficult situations of our brothers and sisters come more and more closer to us through the means of modern communications: we know rapidly and are confronted with the real situation of our brothers and sisters “who are in want of food and drink, of clothing, housing, medicine, work, education, illness”, ect.¹⁸⁰. These circumstances

¹⁷⁷ Peter C. Phan (ed. & comp.), *The Asian Synod: Texts Commentaries* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Book, 2002), p. 158.

¹⁷⁸ Keenan, *Catholic Theological Ethics*, p. 179.

¹⁷⁹ Phan, “The Synod’s Propositions”, *The Asian Synod*, p. 140-165, no. 49.

¹⁸⁰ AA 8.

obviously call for our full attention to face them and to respond properly. The role of the Church to live with the poor must be embodied within the church itself, as the sisters of charity of Saint Mother Teresa do. This preferential option for the poor means also to give witness for justice and the equal rights for all members of society. The Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* calls the laity “to become an instrument of liberation mission of Christ to the poor people”, instrument of justice in the society today as the witness for the kingdom of justice and peace in the world¹⁸¹. And that challenge becomes greater in view of the dedication of the church and her members to work hard for the marginalized and poor people through advocacy them to have equal rights to live in the society¹⁸².

iii. Witnesses and Coworkers of the Truth

Pope Benedict XVI in his book *The Nature and Mission of Theology* defines truth following Thomas Aquinas as “adequation of knowledge and reality”. In other words truth consists in the conformity of human understanding with what *is*, with being, reality. Furthermore His Holiness explains that “the truth, in fact is the medium in which humans make contact, whereas it is the absence of truth which closes us from one another”¹⁸³. Thus, the truth is an important and essential part of human life and of all dimensions of life and societies, which means that every human being has the responsibility to search for truth and to give witness to it. Saint John Paul II expresses that to seek and live the truth is “a prior moral obligation”¹⁸⁴. Therefore, all christians are encouraged to work

¹⁸¹ Cf. *AA* 36.

¹⁸² Phan, “The Synod’s Prepositions”, *The Asian Synod*, p. 157, no. 39.

¹⁸³ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology: Approaches to Understanding its Role in the Light of Present Controversy*, Adrian Walker (trans.) (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), p. 39.

¹⁸⁴ S. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 46.

for the truth and to be an agent who cares and promotes truth in the society, a task which is also clearly expressed in the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*: One goal of the lay apostolate is the evangelization and sanctification of the world which is exercised through the collaboration between the laity and hierarchy by “helping on the cause of truth”¹⁸⁵.

The Decree expresses clearly that a great task of the laity is to become children of truth in any society today so that truth can shine in the world. The mission of the lay people towards the world becomes nowadays broader and more comprehensive. Therefore, the lay people have important and crucial opportunities to witness the truth in the society: In economy, in hospitals, in politics, in various social institutions on national or international level etc. According to each professional dimension of the secular world the lay people encounter great challenges in their task of evangelization and witnessing the truth: When the laity are working in economic institutions they are called to infuse in it the spirit of truth through promotion of an inclusive economy in the society. The root to have so many poor in the modern societies today lies in the lack of sense for justice and sharing of opportunities and goods, lack of solidarity with one another¹⁸⁶.

The laity have a great responsibility to work for causing the truth in all sphere of the world: When the laity are in charge of health care institutions they have to exercise their mission, defend and promote the dignity of human life according to Christian ethics and moral. Every human being is an image of God and has to be protected and respected at all stages of life and in all fields of society. There are many situations today which violate gravely the dignity of human beings: like abortion,

¹⁸⁵ AA 6.

¹⁸⁶ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 188-189.

euthanasia, terrorism, exploitation, prostitution, human trafficking, environment degradation etc. These realities oppose the truth and are rooted in sin and greed, individual and societal egoism. When the lay people assume a political function in the society they have to promote good governance by promoting justice and fostering the common good of all members of a society without discrimination. Or in the words of the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* the laity are called to “infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality and behavior, laws and structures of the community in which one lives”¹⁸⁷. When the laity are working in institutions on the national or international levels they should cooperate with other believers and even unbelievers in working for the cause of truth through advocating human rights, justice and peace. There is a great possibility for the laity to promote truth in the society according to the spirit of the Gospel so that truth permeates and orients all societies as Pope Benedict says: “In the long run only a truth-oriented society, not a happiness-oriented society can succeed”¹⁸⁸. Wherever lay people, they are called to witness the truth according to their own formed moral judgements. They have to witness according to their inner hearts, their conscience considering the teaching of the church, meaning they have to make moral “judgements in the light of truth, to direct one’s activities with a sense of responsibility, and to strive for what is true and just in willing cooperation with others”¹⁸⁹.

Beyond all these challenges the lay faithful are called to face them without fear and doubt and to bring hope and light into the world: “The Church is urging her members

¹⁸⁷ AA 13.

¹⁸⁸ Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, p. 38.

¹⁸⁹ O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, p. 296.

more and more to become involved without fear in temporary activities, to work in the service of their fellow men/women and for common good”¹⁹⁰.

This task of Christians is founded in the mission of Christ: Christ foretold and predicted these challenges to his disciples (Matthew 10: 16-25; Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:12-19). The mission of the apostles was also challenged by the political authorities in the various persecutions against them but they could not overcome them (Acts 4: 1-31; 5:21-33ff). Reflecting on these experiences the lay faithful have to become persons of hope in our society today because we are children of the Risen Lord and our hope is in Him: Christ who says “take heart, it is I; have no fear” ? (Matt 14:27) And “I have conquered the world”(Jn 16:33).

¹⁹⁰ Griffin, “The Integration of Spiritual and Temporal: Contemporary Roman Catholic Church-State Theory”, p. 235.

CONCLUSION

The Second Vatican Council made great contributions for the renewal of all aspects of the teaching of the church and her mission in the modern world. This significant contributions of the Council are also manifest regarding to the issue of the lay people. They are not any more merely understood as the members of the Church but they are church themselves as described in the Decree on the *Apostolate of Lay People*. The Decree expresses very positively the understanding of the lay people and their mission in the Church. The theological foundation of this new understanding of the laity was worked out in *Lumen Gentium*, and is highlighted also in others documents of Vatican II.

The Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* understands the involvement of the lay people in the mission of the church is based on their full participation in the priesthood of Christ. Christ shares with the entire baptized faithful his office of priesthood in the priestly, kingly and prophetically ministry. Therefore, they are assigned to exercise their priesthood in the church and in the world. This participation of the lay People in the three fold mission of Christ orients them fully towards their final mission in their involvement in the transformation of the world according to the spirit of the Gospel. The council develops as the main principal dimension the christocentric-mission meaning that all members of the Church, the lay people, the ordained ministers, and the religious, derive their mission from the one ministry and the high Priest Jesus Christ.

The calling for this mission is the calling to discipleship and ministry by Christ in the church and in the world deriving from the nature of the calling of lay people to be the people God through faith and through the gifts of the sacraments. With the basis from the calling from God and nourished by the grace of sacraments the lay faithful are able to exercise their mission to live up to their faith in daily life. As the people of God they unite themselves with the all members of the church in the same dignity to participate properly in all activities of the church. To live their ministry in communion with the hierarchally ministry is another principal dimension of their mission. This communal mission is a sharing in the ministry in the church. The above mentioned full participation of the laity in the mission of the church does not mean they compete with the heirarchy and religious but is both complementary and unique. Each member of the church, in communion with all contributes to build up the Body of Christ through living their charisms, vocation and functions. Thus, the lay faithful continue to have a great, indispensable and increasing role in the Church and in the world today.

It is a great role of the hierarchical ministry to enable and to foster the active participation of the laity in the Church as envisioned by the Second Vatican Council in its Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. We need to foster continuously the active involvement of lay people for the good of the mission of the church. We realize that this vision of the Decree is not yet fully implemented in the Church due to various reasons. On the other hand we also cannot ignore the impact of the vision of *Apostolicam Actuositatem* and Vatican II in view of renewal and transformation in the Church. Thus, the whole church is required to bo open for this renewal in order to become up-to-date in her apostolics activities and to give proper witness to the Good News for our times.

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